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A

LETTER

TO

Cardinal COSCIA,

ON THE

DEATH

OF

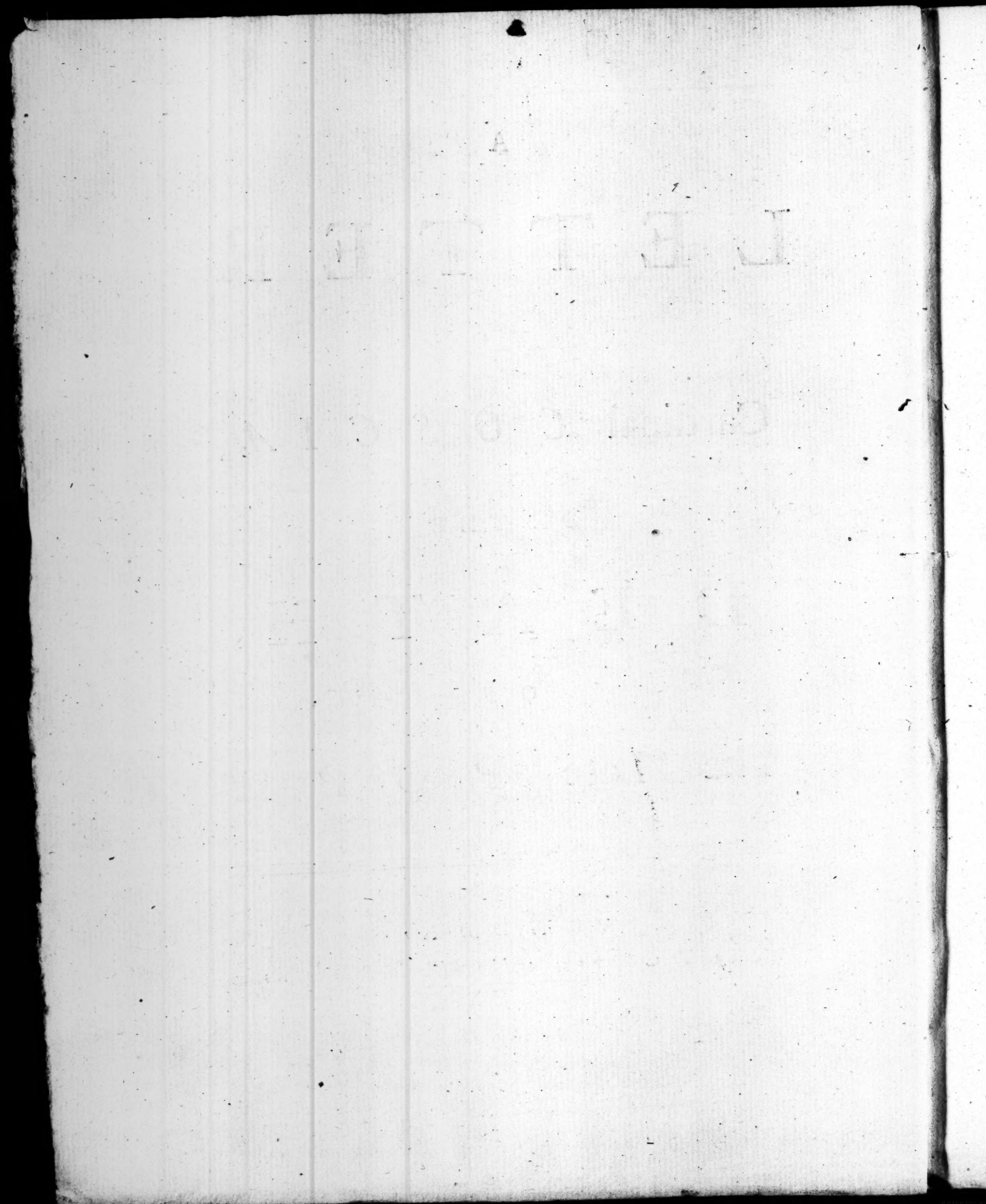
The Late POPE.

L O N D O N :

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MDCCXXXVII.

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May it please your EMINENCE,

A MIDST your undissembled Sorrows for so insupportable a Loss, suffer me to share in the Condolence of your Misfortune, by an earnest and serious Expostulation on the Spiritual Benefits you may reap from the Death of his *Holiness*, however your Temporal Interests may suffer thereby. For now, probably, you may find Time to reflect on your past Conduct; since the *Distribution of Benefices* will not so constantly employ your all-grasping Imagination, nor the Invention of Methods to protect Monopolies, perplex your accumulating Desires. Thoughts, free from the Clog of Advantage may now soar towards Reason, and the Desire of Wealth may find some Bounds, when the Power of encreasing it is, in some measure, determined: And as from the deepest Affliction some desirable End is frequently obtained; so, from the Shock of the *Pontiff's* Departure hence, you may, very possibly, be put upon seeking after Repentence, which, whilst you had the Care of his Imperial Mitre, it is to be feared you would not soon have found Leisure to search after: And, as the most Friendly Assistance of any is that which contributes most to our Spiritual Welfare, I beg the Liberty, on this extraordinary Occasion, to address your Eminence with the Freedom of an Equal, that I may offer you my Sentiments with-

out the Restraint which generally damps the Spirit of an Address to a Superior; hoping, nevertheless, to retain so just a Sense of the Deference due to your many times exalted Station, as will prevent my saying any thing impertinent, or unworthy your Consideration.

THE first thing, then, I would recommend to your Reflection, is the State of his *Holiness*, before you became his *Prime Minister*. — He was, before his supreme Advancement, very generally esteemed: As a private Doctor of the Church, his Behaviour was not only blameless, but much admired; he discharged the Holy Offices of his Function with great Diligence, and those Hours which were not required in his immediate Duty, he employed in composing Treatises that are prized as the most excellent Performances of their Kind, and gained him that universal Regard which reached the Ears of his Superiors, who raised him to the Dignity of a Bishop, with the chearful Consent of the People, and to the highest Satisfaction of all who wished well to Learning and Virtue. In this Station he remained for more than Ten Years, with as much Credit as he ascended it, when, the *Papacy* becoming vacant, he was advanced to the Holy See, as a most fit Person to support that Dignity with the Wisdom and Authority it requires. — In this high Station also, he retained the general Regard of the People for some time; but it did not continue: And to what Cause can we attribute the sudden Change? Not to *himself*, surely, but to your *Eminence*; because it has been observed by many, that on your gaining the Ascendant over his *declining* Judgment, his Conduct began to be disapproved, and grew gradually *worse and worse*, as you advanced in his Favour, till his Administration in the Church became to be

be as publicly *condemned*, as it had before been *approved*; to the great Injury of a Character that might otherwise have passed without Blame, and the open Perversion of the Pontifical Authority.

THIS demands your most serious Attention; for if his late *Holiness*, from a Confidence in you, entrusted you with the Execution of his Office, what better was a *Misapplication* of the Power lent you by his *Holiness*, than a *Breach of the Trust reposed in you*; for we cannot help thinking, from the former Actions of his Life, that he always *designed well*, however illy his Intentions might be executed: — Hence I am struck at the Load of Guilt, which, if this should have been the Case, and every Body says it was, must rest on your *Eminence*, without a Possibility of easing your Shoulders otherwise than by Repentance, which yet, I fear, will fall short of Restitution! — Here, methinks, I see your Confusion, and your Remorse: Restrain it not; for *great Enormities* ought to produce *severe Contrition*: What can you offer to the Manes of the Holy Departed Father, in order to restore the Fame you have robbed him off? How can you bear the Thought of reading an unbiassed History of the Pontificate of *Benedict XIII.* and yet you know his Transactions must be recorded along with those of the other Popes: Will *his* make the Figure they ought, or that which might be expected from so excellent a Prelate? Will the Annals of his Administration appear agreeable to the Idea we must frame of him from his Works? And, if these are found deficient, will not some Reason be assigned for the Failure? And how will that be done without placing your *Eminence* in a Light that will be apt to draw the Contempt of Posterity on your Memory, to the End

of Time? Though Fame is coveted by all with equal Zeal, can such a Remembrance as this be desirable? Is it not better to have a Name die, than, like *Erostatius*, reach succeeding Ages in an ignominious Light! I well know you will always be mentioned as his Holiness's *First Minister*, and consequently as the *Second Person* in the Church Authority; but can you expect to be spoke of as a *Good Minister*, and as one who made a proper Use of the Confidence his Master reposed in him?

ONE thing, I apprehend, will look much to your Disadvantage; and that is your heaping so many Preferments on Yourself: This was certainly a very wrong Step, as it made every body think you had no other End in view than your *Private Advantage*, which should be the last thing regarded by a *Publick Minister*: Besides, there was a farther Indiscretion in your taking so many Benefices to your own Use; because it put Men upon an Enquiry after your MERIT: It being always the Custom, in Communities where Benefices are rightly bestowed, to make them bear some Proportion to the *Desert* of the Persons to whom they are given.—This Enquiry caused many to ask, What Service you had done the Church that required so prodigious a Recompence? Whether it was your PREACHING, or your WRITINGS, that had occasioned you to be so highly distinguished from your Brethren? Your exemplary Life and Conversation, or your profound Knowledge in Laws Ecclesiastical, and in the Constitution of the Church? I do not chuse to repeat the usual Answers to these Questions, but leave your Eminence to guess them; since, as you are best acquainted with your own Endowments, you are most able of any to judge what were the proper Replies.

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HAD you not been so directly at the Helm of the Church Affairs, you might, perhaps, have possessed all you now enjoy, and have undergone very little Censure: But, as the Distribution of so many Offices was known to lie almost entirely in your own Power, there appeared something like a *Meanness of Spirit*, as well as an *immoderate Avarice*, in retaining every thing in your own Hands that you could any way contrive how to keep, so as to evade the Design of our Church Laws. When his *Holiness* consulted you on whom he should bestow a wealthy Preferment? were you always unable to make any other Answer than, ON ME! And, how odd must such a Reply have sounded in the Ear of any By-stander, when made to the Offer of a *sine Cure*, fit only for a Reward to an ancient and laborious Minister, when incapable of discharging the Duties of his Office! With what Countenance could you *solicit*, or even *accept* it? Or what can be said in your Vindication? Did it not declare your Thirst of Money insatiable!— This, added to your numerous other Places, has set such an Example to our Clergy by your glaring so from the *Fountain of their Instruction and Discipline*, that all who have the slightest Probability of Success, are running with such Vehemence after *Additional* Preferments, as would make one ready to suppose they thought it a Part of their Duty.

IT will avail little to urge here your contracted Relation to his Holiness, in Defence of your vast Acquisitions; since, whatever Services you may have done his *Niece*, as they are not done the Church, it appears not at all reasonable that the Church should reward you for them; for a Temporal Recompence must be an
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ample Amends for Performances which have but small Claim to Spiritual Notice.

THIS violent Pursuit of Riches has a Chain of bad Effects; for, besides the Injury it does to the Ministers themselves, it is the utter Ruin of their Parishioners; there being no such thing as getting them to mind what their Parson says, when they see him so far from minding it himself: For, since they have been corrupted by heretical Books, they all take upon them to *reason*, and have Assurance enough to insist on a Minister's conforming himself to the Doctrines he preaches, in order to convince them he *means* what he *says*: Without which they are now apt to conclude that their Teacher, when he tells them of the Necessity there is of their contemplating worldly Treasure, does it only to put *them* out of Conceit with it, in order to come the more easily at it *himself*. — In like manner they do not scruple even at questioning the Authority of their Pastor over them, when he takes Courses *they* think contrary to Christianity or Morality; as if his Divine Authority and Commission were less effectual when officiating in his Publick Duty as a *Minister*, because in his private Conduct he falls short of what is required of all his Parish!

THESE Liberties, which have lately, like an Inundation, rushed in upon the Church, make Circumspection the more necessary in those to whom her Welfare is committed: For, as the Itch of arguing daily gains Ground, the Case is not now, as formerly, when an Apoloftolical *Ipsè Dixit* was sufficient to enforce any thing; for, unless a Clergyman can offer some plausible *Reason* for what he enjoins, he now runs a hazard of being

being disregarded, and, sometimes, of being ridiculed to his Face, in a manner destitute of the Deference due to his Character: Thus did I, not long ago, hear a Person whom his *Minister* was advising to part with *one of his Shops*, from the Impossibility of his looking *properly after both*, reply, with an impertinent Sneer of Gravity: "Certainly, Doctor, it is full as possible for me to stand in my two Shops at one time, as for you to preach from two Pulpits the same Instant: Deputies are alike wanted in both; and Journeymen are plenty enough in our Business, however they may be in your Employment."—— Another, a short time after this, being very warmly reprov'd by the same Gentleman on a Supposition of *Polygamy*, returned upon him, "Sir, I am not now guilty of what you blame me for; but if hereafter I should fall into that Error, the Reproof of a Person guilty of *Spiritual Polygamy*, which is the worst of any, would have little Influence towards convincing me of my Failing."

I make bold to mention these familiar Instances of the Evils that are like to be done by the *Pluralities of our Clergy*, because from such Examples falling under my Notice in so short a Time, it is natural to conclude, that the same Spirit that produced them will soon become universal, if the Grounds for these Reflections are not removed; which would be greatly detrimental to Christianity in General: For when People have once arrived at the *Contempt of their Teachers*, they seldom stop short of a *Disregard for the Doctrine* they endeavour to inculcate; — Which makes it of the utmost Importance to the Church, that all Occasions of this Licentious Manner of treating our Clergy, be remedied. — And your Eminence could not think it hard, should we expect you to shew the *first* Instance of *relinquishing*

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some of your Preferments; because as you have been the repeated Occasion of Complaint in this respect, so much as even to become the Subject of insulting *Plates* and *Pamphlets*, the *Renouncing* of *one* Living, or other Benefice by *you*, would call more Attention from the Publick, than for any other Monopolist to give up double the Number; and we might therefore hope it would produce the more Imitations, to the entire Reduction of all the Pluralities in the Church, and the better Provision of such as are now so frequently termed *The Poor Clergy*, and to the Returning all *Bounties* appropriated for their Assistance, to the Publick Coffers!

SHOULD your Eminence be thus happy in Beginning so necessary a Work, we might, by Degrees, begin to see in our Clergy some Resemblance to the great Examples they pretend to follow; for, could I hope to be so far indulged, I would beg leave to ask you, what you know of yourself which, in your own Judgment, bears any Likeness to those *Apostles* whose Successors you declare yourselves, and whose Office you execute in their stead; — Suppose, during his late Holiness's Life, St. Peter, in *propria persona*, had made a Visit to the *Vatican*? How would he have been astonished to find a Person by Virtue of being received for his Successor, enjoying a *Temporal Throne*, while himself could recollect no Declaration that ever made him Sovereign over *Half an Acre*! And how repugnant to his Gospel-Doctrine of *Humility* and *Self-Denial* would appear his Successors *Stores of Riches* and *Cloud of Wordly Grandeur*! And, to descend lower, when he had beheld his Habit and Pompous Attire, how would he have been startled! And what a Disagreement would have been between the *Fountain* and the *Stream*! Do you think St. Peter would have mistaken him for a Gospel Minister?

Minister? Or would he have fallen to preach against the *Delusions of the Heathen*? — And, if he had doubted before, would he not have been confirmed in his Opinion, when he had seen a few within Doors wallow in Superfluities, while the Gates were shut to the most *piercing Entreaties* of the Necessitous, who craved Relief to their unhappy and helpless Conditions, from Without. — Should we yet suppose, farther, the *Apostle*, in the next Place, to have made a Scrutiny into *your Actions* as a Minister of the Church which he so zealously laboured to establish, How would he have wondered to hear you and most of your Brethren deriving your Office from the *Scriptures* which he and his Fellow-Labourers in the Church left for a *Rule* to conduct all succeeding Christians! when he could scarce be able to find the smallest Affinity between your Behaviour and the Directions for a Minister's Conduct as there laid down: — And, that your Eminence may more clearly perceive this Opposition between the *Scriptures* and the Order of Men you are of, I beg the Liberty of mentioning, very briefly, a few of the Particulars; and, to prevent Repetitions, I will, with your Eminence's Leave, use the Word *Parson* to imply *you* and those of your Brethren who so evidently contradict the *Scripture-Model* of a *Christian Priest*; it not being my Design, in the present Use of that Term, to imply any Gentleman who deserves the Name of a Gospel Minister.

The *Scriptures* say, Mankind shall have the *Milk of the Word* without Money, and without Price:

The *Parson* is so far from conforming to this Doctrine, that he not only demands Money for such *Milk*, or *Instruction*, as he cares to bestow upon us, and we to receive; but he insists upon being paid for such Lectures,
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as, very often, are found unworthy even of a bare Attention; nay, he very frequently insists upon his *Price* for Duties which, either from Indolence, or from *other* Employments, he seldom or never performs.

The *Scriptures* assure us, That the Ministers of *Christ* shall have their Reward in the *Next Life*; but that in *This* they must expect *Poverty, Buffeting, and Adversity*:

The *Parson* declares the Contrary; unless he receives his Reward in *This* Life, he is so far from suffering himself to be buffeted for *Christ's* sake, that, sooner than trust to the Next Life for his Arrears, he leaves his Flock to stray without Controul from him.

The *Scriptures* say, It is the *Humble* God will teach his Ways, and the *Meek* he will guide in Judgment:

The *Parson* then, it is to be feared, partakes of but a very small Share of this *Teaching*; he being seldom longer *humble*, than he has a View of Profitting by it; and, when he is once fixed in a Living, be he ever so *imperious*, he nevertheless takes upon him to teach OTHERS the Ways of God, though, by *Pride, Ambition, and Avarice*, he is incapable of knowing them HIMSELF.

The *Scriptures*, in several Places, bid the Christian Ministers cherish and *abide* by the Flock first committed to their Charge, and forbid their *abandoning* them on *any* Consideration whatever:

The *Parson* takes Care of his *first* Flock no longer than till he can obtain better Pay for feeding a *second*, and leaves that as soon as he can procure Two-pence more for *looking after a third*; Whence it seems rather to be *Gold*, than God, he has in View; when, instead of abiding by his first Flock, in obedience to Scripture, for *Gain* he leaves it for Chance and Poverty to send another, however qualified, to instruct them. The

The *Scriptures* advise the *Believers*, out of which number, I presume, the *Clergy* were not designed to be excluded, To have no Regard to what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or with what they are cloathed; but first to seek the Kingdom of Heaven, and then all these Things will be added:

The *Parson* pays very small Regard to this Advice, and must either seek the Kingdom of Heaven very young, or possess the promised Consequences of so doing, without the Scripture Condition:— His Eating is commonly the best his Parish affords, to procure which he is so kind as to visit the most plentiful Tables in his Neighbourhood, whenever his own happens to be but indifferently furnished:— He is seldom found to be less careful with respect to his Drinking; being always supposed to have a most delicate Palate for tasting Wine, and the true Secret of mixing the finest Sherbet; but is not thought to have any extraordinary Judgment in the Excellencies either of Water or Small-Beer:— His Cloathing he is so far from shaping after the Gospel-Pattern, that, unless it be of such a Colour, and made after such a Fashion, it is not suffered to surround him; and even his Hat must have a Mark to distinguish it from those wore by other Men, in order to put all who see it in mind of the particular Reverence due to the Person beneath it.

The *Scriptures* advise us, Not to be anxious after the fading Pleasures of this World, after Titles, or Honours from Men:

The *Parson* covets Honours from Men; hastes to be a Master of Arts, pants for the Degree of a Doctor, glad if a Mandamus eases him of a Year or two; then has his Eye directly on some Deanry, and 'tis Ten to One whether he can help squinting a Mitre.

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The *Scriptures* say, We cannot serve both God and *Mammon*:

The *Parson* makes no manner of Difficulty in serving them both at once; or, if he cannot, it is easy to see which is preferred: Since without a Certainty of the *One*, he does not even pretend to serve the *Other*.

The *Scriptures* forbid our having *Fellowship*, or keeping any other *Conversation* with the *Wicked*, than what will tend to their speedy Amendment:

The *Parson* says, that though Sir *John* is a Man of the most profligate Life and Conduct, and too free and obscene in his Discourse; yet, as he keeps a good Table, has his Cellars always well supplied, and does not want *Generosity*, he chuses rather to *wink at his Failings*, than to risque the Loss of so bountiful a Friend, by any Attempts to reclaim him.

The *Scriptures* command the *Faithful* to communicate of their Temporal Abundance to all who stand in need of it, as an indispensable *Christian Duty*:

The *Parson* will, indeed, and daily does, receive from those who have not a *necessary Provision for Themselves*; but his manner of *ministring to the Necessities of Others*, is too well known to your Eminence, to require my Enlargement!

THIS Comparison, I hope, will not any Way offend your Eminence; which I the less apprehend, since I remember that when, some Time ago, I had the Pleasure of hearing you preach *once in one* of your Churches, you, *seemingly in good Earnest*, referred your *Hearers*, with some Warmth, to the *Scriptures*, as the *only certain Rule* to judge of the *Chimerical Phrensies*, as you called them, of the pretended

tended *Reasoners* of this *licentious Age* : — Now if the *Scripture* is a *fit Rule* whereby to judge those who pay very little *Regard* to its *Authority* ; it cannot be an *improper Standard* for measuring the *Conduct* of such as pretend *that* to be the sole *Guide* of their *Actions* : Wherefore I have ventured to make the *Rule* and the *boasted Followers of it*, appear together : If there is not found between them the *Agreement* that could be wished, I am persuaded you will not attribute the *Failure* to any *Partiality* in my *Representation* ; the *Citations from Scripture* being what every *Person* is acquainted with, and every thing said of the *Parson*, and much more, your *Eminence* has well known to be justified by *Daily Experience*.

FROM this *Disagreement* of the declared *Principles* of our *Clergymen*, with their open *Practices*, may be traced the *True* and *Only Source* of the *Contempt* which *Men of your Order* so loudly complain of : And this, I humbly conceive, is the *Fountain* whence springs that *Disregard of your Instructions*, at this time so prevalent among all *Degrees of Men* : — Could we but once be so happy as to have *Reason* to believe, from their *Example*, that the *Thoughts* of our *Spiritual Leaders* accompanies what they *preach*, it would not be long before a general *Amendment of Manners* would be visible in their *Hearers* : For the *Actions* of a *Man* are esteemed more demonstrative *Proofs* of his real *Belief* and *Sentiments*, than can possibly be drawn from his *Verbal Declarations* : Whence appears the *Necessity*, since a *Reformation* is universally allowed to be wanted, that it should begin among our *Clergy* ; they being the only *Persons* who will have the *Recommending* and *Increasing* it immediately in *Charge* ; and their *Labours* to that *End* cannot reasonably be expected to have any desirable *Success*, 'till, by their *own Amendment*, they shew us that they *think it necessary*.

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WHEN this is done, I will promise for the present Age, *bad* as it is so often said to be, that there are still living so many Friends to Virtue and Christianity, as would, by their Voices and Influence, stem the Rapidity of that Torrent which threatens the Destruction even of Religion itself.——But, *till then*, no Remedy can be hoped.

THIS single Thought was the Cause of my giving your Eminence this Trouble; for, I considered that as your *Bad Example* had hitherto been of the most fatal Influence to the Church of which you are so CONSIDERABLE a Member; your *Beginning* a Work of Reformation, as there is no Doubt of its being *followed* by all who have *followed* you already, might produce such a Change in the Face of our Ecclesiastical Affairs, as would make it remembered, even with Pleasure, to latest Posterity, *That He who was the GREATEST Cause of the Church's Disgrace, was the FIRST who set about Removing the too just Occasions of Complaint against her.*

THAT this may be truly said of your Eminence; and that never, after taking so laudable a Step, you may *flinch* from your Character, as a Gospel Minister, is the sincere Wish of

The Admirer of all

Your Virtues,

A LAY-BROTHER.